

The heroin and fentanyl epidemic is taking a devastating toll on all of our communities. Police officers in Maine tell me about the familiar patterns they see: Drug dealers and gang members, often from out-of-State and with criminal records, cross into Maine and approach drug addicts to be their straw buyers, people with clean records who may legally purchase firearms. They target addicts, who exchange guns for heroin to support their drug dependencies, and the cycle repeats time and again.

I received a briefing from Federal law enforcement officials about a case in Maine fitting this exact pattern. Gang members trafficked crack cocaine and heroin between New Haven, CT, and Bangor, ME, and committed acts of violence including assaults, armed robberies, attempted murder, and murder. They traded narcotics for firearms and then distributed those firearms to other gang members. This is exactly the criminal activity our bill aims to prevent. And our bill would complement existing laws that target criminals who are profiting off of firearm and drug trafficking.

It is very difficult to prevent and prosecute straw purchasing offenses under current Federal law. As I stated, right now, a straw purchaser can be prosecuted only for lying on a Federal form, which amounts to a paperwork violation.

The Stop Illegal Trafficking in Firearms Act would create new, specific criminal offenses for straw purchasing and trafficking in firearms. Instead of a slap on the wrist, these crimes would be punishable by up to 15 years in prison. For those straw purchasers who know or have reasonable cause to believe that the firearm they are acquiring will be used to commit a crime of violence, that crime would be punishable by up to 25 years in prison.

Our bill would also strengthen existing laws that prohibit gun smuggling. Right now, it is illegal for someone to smuggle a firearm into the United States with the intent to engage in drug trafficking or violent crime. To combat the drug cartels operating across our southern border, however, we must also prohibit firearms and ammunition from being trafficked out of the United States for these illegal purposes. In doing so, our bill would provide an important tool to combat trafficking organizations that are exporting firearms and ammunition from the United States and into Mexico where they are used by drug cartels that are in turn fueling the heroin crisis here at home.

I also want to emphasize that our bill protects the Second Amendment right of law-abiding citizens. It protects legitimate private gun sales and is drafted to avoid sweeping in innocent transactions and placing unnecessary burdens on lawful, private sales. It expressly exempts certain transactions that are allowed under current law, such as gifts, raffles, and auctions.

Furthermore, the bill expressly prohibits any authority provided by this act from being used to establish a Federal firearms registry.

The Stop Illegal Trafficking and Firearms Act will help keep guns out of the hands of criminals without infringing upon the constitutional rights of law-abiding citizens. I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

IRISH-AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, today I wish to commemorate Irish-American Heritage Month and the many contributions of Irish immigrants to the United States of America. The Irish have been a part of our country since its foundation. Donegal-born Richard Montgomery was the first American general to lose his life in the Revolutionary War. Especially during the 19th and early 20th centuries, many Irish immigrants came to America to escape religious persecution, famine, and economic hardship, and to seek new opportunities for themselves and their families.

Maryland's long tradition of religious tolerance provided safe haven for many Irish Catholics fleeing religious persecution as early as the 17th century. Maryland again became a leading destination for the Irish during the Great Hunger in the early 19th century. The Irish helped build and defend our country. They became farmers, soldiers, firefighters, police officers, factory workers, labor organizers, and politicians. Many Irish immigrants settled in southwest Baltimore and contributed great numbers to the workforce that built America's first railroad, the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad.

Irish Marylanders have made notable contributions to both our Nation and our State in politics, science, and education. Marylander Charles Carroll of Carrollton, a third-generation Irish American, signed the Declaration of Independence, was a Founding Father, and served as the first U.S. Senator for Maryland. Medical trailblazer John Crawford emigrated from Ireland to Maryland and became famous for his contributions to eradicating smallpox, helping to identify transmission pathways, and improving vaccine distribution. Maryland has been home to numerous Irish Catholic bishops including John Carroll, James Gibbons, and Michael Curley. Bishop Carroll founded two universities, including St. Mary's College and Seminary. Bishop Gibbons advocated for the protection of exploited laborers during industrial expansion. Bishop Curley expanded education opportunities throughout Maryland. Descendants of Irish immigrants have also left their mark on America and on Maryland. Famous Marylanders with Irish ancestry include Edgar Allan Poe and Michael Phelps.

When the Irish came to America, they brought a tremendous sense of pride and grit. The resiliency of Irish

Americans has helped pull our Nation through difficult times. Irish Americans, despite facing trials and persecution, have persevered and have left a lasting, beneficial impact on our Nation; Yet they also maintain a strong and unique sense of identity and love for the Emerald Isle, enriching the diversity of our lives and communities. So, this month, in addition to donning your green and enjoying a pint of Guinness, I call on all Americans to remember and appreciate the many contributions of the Irish here in America.

HONORING OFFICER TYLER HERNDON

Mr. BURR. Mr. President, I want to honor the life of Officer Tyler Avery Herndon of the Mount Holly Police Department. On December 11, 2020, Officer Herndon's life was tragically cut short at just 25 years old while responding to a report of a break-in. I want to take a moment to remember him and his commitment to his community.

Officer Herndon had served in the Mount Holly Police Department for just shy of 2 years before his young life was taken. He had ambitions of becoming an FBI agent and was approaching the time needed as a police officer to become eligible to apply. He was described by his fellow officers as "the guy you just can't help but like" and someone who "lived a life of service, and always wanted to do what he could to help others."

Officer Herndon served the people of Mount Holly, NC, and today, we remember how he made the ultimate sacrifice. I want his family and the Mount Holly Police Department to know that my thoughts and prayers are with them as they grieve the loss of this exceptional young man. I know that Officer Herndon will be forever missed, and his service and sacrifice will not be forgotten.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOOD BANK OF DELAWARE

• Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I rise today on behalf of Delaware's congressional delegation in honor of the Food Bank of Delaware, which has provided healthy, nutritious food and education to Delaware families for 40 years.

The Food Bank of Delaware began its work in 1981 out of a modest basement in the Northeast State Services Center in Wilmington. Today, it is the largest hunger relief organization in the State. In the last fiscal year alone, the Food Bank of Delaware distributed more than 15 million pounds of food, served more than 49,000 households through its mobile pantry program, distributed 143,000 backpacks stocked with food to at-risk youth, provided nearly 28,000 supplemental food boxes to seniors, and inspired volunteers to give 49,000 hours of their time to help at its 2 warehouses and food distribution events.